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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SEVENTH IMAM PILGRIMAGE: IRAQI MOI AND MOD PREPARE
TO PREVENT TRAGEDY

Classified By: Deputy Pol-Mil Counselor Apar Sidhu for Reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: In order to avoid a repletion of last years tragedy when nearly one thousand pilgrims were killed at the Seventh Imam pilgrimage, both the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) have conducted extensive operational planning to ensure order and prevent a repeat tragedy. This year's event begins on August 20. Success in this major test of Iraqi's security ministries will be considered a significant milestone in measuring the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces and in establishing a professionally competent security structure. END SUMMARY.

Festival of Musa al Kazim

¶2. (U) The festival of Musa al Kazim begins on August 20 and culminates with a pilgrimage to the tombs of 7th and 9th Imams near Baghdad. The purpose of the festival is to celebrate the memory of the Shia Imam, who is thought to have been poisoned by the Abbasid Ruler of Baghdad in 799, whose body was displayed on a Baghdad bridge, then buried in Kazimain. His body now rests in a shrine in the northern neighborhood in Baghdad, al-Kadhimiyyah.

¶3. (U) Last year's event was marred by tragedy when nearly a thousand pilgrims, panicked by rumors of a suicide bomber, were trampled to death on the Adhamiyah-Kadhimiyyah Bridge or drown when a bridge railing gave way. The Multinational Division-Baghdad Quick Reaction Force (QRF/MND-B) was rebuffed by pilgrims as they tried to assist drowning worshippers.

Security Preparations

¶4. (S/NF) This year, MOI has overall operational responsibility for the mission with support from MOD. This is one of the first major tests of the improved Iraqi security forces. These forces will be responsible for the control of access points and routes to and from the shrine including all bridges, as well as employment of quick reaction forces to respond to disturbances. MND-B forces will provide background support including intelligence and aerial surveillance to assist in preventing insurgent terror attacks, especially from mortars.

¶5. (S/NF) COMMENT: Most observers consider the Iraqi preparations as a great improvement over the previous year.

There has been significant work by both the MOI and MOD staffs to develop a plan for crowd control, checkpoints, quick reaction force employment, and to deconflict command and control responsibilities, especially in regard to bridge access. Staff preparations were by and large done in accordance with US military command and staff procedures and included war-gaming sessions by the senior Iraqi and coalition force commanders responsible for the mission. Successful management of this major Shi'a festival will be a significant sign that both MOI and MOD are becoming effective forces able to plan and conduct complex joint operations independent of Coalition force leadership. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD